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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: CHAVEZ: MAKING FRIENDS AND INFLUENCING PEOPLE

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(d)

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Summary  
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1. (C) One of President Hugo Chavez's principal mechanisms for influencing regional leaders have been international conferences such as the Bolivarian People's Congresses, a push to spread his ideology and influence through a conference similar to Cuba's Tri-Continental Congress in the 1960's. Many of those attending the Congresses are involved in political activity aimed at exploiting unstable or fragile situations in their countries, such as Bolivia's Evo Morales.

The recent dispute between Colombia and Venezuela over the capture of FARC leader Rodrigo Granda after he attended the Second Bolivarian Congress in December 2004 illustrated the range of organizations that participate. While the Congresses are an overt forum for leftist revolutionary personalities such as Sandinistas Tomas Borges and Daniel Ortega and FMLN leader Schafik Handal, it is suspected that they provide an opportunity for Chavez to come through with direct assistance. The next Congress is scheduled for April 14-16. End Summary.

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International Conferences, Radical Elements  
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2. (U) One of President Hugo Chavez's mechanisms for exporting his "Bolivarian revolution" and expanding contact with sympathetic and extremist regional leaders has been the Bolivarian People's Congresses in November 2003 and December 2004, beginning with the planning meeting in August 2003. The Second Congress dubbed 2005 the "Year of the Offensive and Advance of Unity of the Peoples of Latin American and the Caribbean" and established a permanent Secretariat in Caracas. Similar gatherings such as the 4th annual International Social Debt Conference in February, and the Conference of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity in December 2004, also created opportunities for Chavez to expand his circle of influence. The next Bolivarian People's Congress is scheduled for April 14-16.

3. (C) The meetings' purported goals of uniting Latin America's "popular" political and social forces to coordinate and cooperate in fighting for "liberation" include messages that are anti-imperialist, anti-neoliberalist, anti-globalization and free-trade, and often are anti-American. Participants include leftist and socialist leaders, indigenous representatives, and former guerrilla leaders turned politicians. The conferences are an opportunity to publicly build links between these players. Privately, the meetings also give Chavez access to build personal relationships and offer suggestions and support to visiting organizers of popular movements. Alberto Garrido, who has written several books on Chavez, said in a December 2003 interview, "The internationalization of the Bolivarian Revolution is through the Bolivarian People's Congress."

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In Cuba: Taking a Page Out of Castro's Book  
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4. (U) The Bolivarian Congresses are similar to Castro's Tricontinental Congresses first held in Havana in 1966 and known as "First Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America." Indeed, Chavez is probably the only Latin leader other than Castro who has publicly mentioned the "tricontinental" and "Bandung" conferences. While the Bolivarian Congresses seem more regional in focus, they also include radical Palestinian political leaders as did Castro's 1966 version. Substitute anti-colonialism for anti-globalization, anti-neocolonialism for anti-neoliberalism, keep anti-imperialism as a trademark, focus the anti-American movement on leaders in vulnerable countries in Latin America rather than three continents, add 40 years--and the Bolivarian Congresses are born. The Congress participants self-declared goal is uniting Latin America's "popular" (populist) political and social forces to coordinate and cooperate in fighting for "liberation."

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Bolivia: Democratic Instability  
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15. (C) Bolivian Movimiento al Socialismo's (MAS) Evo Morales was in Caracas for both the first and second Bolivarian Congresses, as well as the February debt forum. Chavez, who Morales publicly acknowledges as a friend and the regional leader he most relates to, meets privately with Morales during his visits. Observers speculate that Morales' grabs for power, incitations to riot, and speeches full of rhetoric are influenced and encouraged by his private talks with Chavez. Morales' recent allegations of intensified efforts to plot his assassination, published on the Bolivarian Congress' website, echo Chavez's own repeated claims that the USG would like to assassinate him.

16. (C) While Morales has been more in the Bolivarian limelight recently, Chavez has also cultivated ties with another of Bolivia's leftist indigenous leaders, ex-guerrilla Felipe Quispe, whose push for a "participatory democracy" coincides with Chavez's. Sumate's Alejandro Plaz, speaking to a U.S. official April 2, used Bolivia as an example of how Chavez uses the threat of turning the left against a vulnerable leader to neutralize critics and forge alliances. El Universal's assistant political editor, Ernesto Ecarri, called Chavez's approach to other regional leaders "aggressive domination."

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Colombia: Insecurity Across the Border  
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17. (U) The capture of FARC "Foreign Minister" Rodrigo Granda in December 2004 caused a scandal and tensions between Colombia and Venezuela. The FARC communique said Granda's presence in Venezuela was at the request, and with the approval, of the GOV. The GOV sought to divert attention from Granda's presence in Venezuela, but it soon became public knowledge that not only had Granda participated in the December Bolivarian Congress, but he had Venezuelan identity documents and reportedly even voted in the August recall referendum. The evidence of the FARC's presence in Venezuela lent credence to allegations that Chavez supports the FARC.

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Peru: Democracy By Violence  
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18. (U) Former Peruvian Army officer Antauro Humala, and leader of the Ethno-Cacerista New Year's Eve 2005 aborted attempt to takeover a Peruvian National Police station, visited Caracas in December 2004 and participated in the panel discussion on "The People and the Armed Forces." Press sources report that Humala has received funding from Chavez, but there is no confirmation.

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Ecuador: Indigenous Movements Support Chavez  
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19. (U) Gilberto Talahua, member of Ecuador's Pachakutick movement, political arm of CONAIE, attended the December 2004 Bolivarian Congress as did other leaders of CONAIE and ECUARUNAI. Chavez has also hosted Pachakutick representatives on his Sunday television show numerous times over the past two years at least, an indication that the links extend beyond participation in the Bolivarian Congresses.

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Mexico: Brief Encounters  
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10. (U) In May 2004, the Venezuelan Ambassador to Mexico, Lino Martinez, had harsh words for President Vicente Fox and compared the Mexican political situation to the situation in Venezuela before Chavez came to power. Martinez called Mexico City Mayor Andres Lopez Obrador a "ray of hope" and also named Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the "moral leader of the PRD," as another potential leader for Mexico. Observers note that Cardenas was a speaker and participant in Chavez's August 2003 planning session for the Bolivarian Congress. He also met with Chavez in Mexico in January 2004, shortly before Martinez's statements identifying Cardenas and Lopez as leaders in Mexico.

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Central America--Hand in the Pot  
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11. (C) In Guatemala, reporting indicates that the government suspects Chavez of using the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) or Alianza Nueva Nacion (ANN) to fund public protests and buy political loyalties from left-wing

parties. El Salvador's Jorge Schafik Handal an ex-guerrilla and founder of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) has been both participant and speaker at the Bolivarian Congresses. While he lost the March 2004 presidential elections, Schafik and the FMLN had public and financial support, according to public statements from FMLN officials, from the Bolivarian Congress organization. Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNLF) founder Tomas Borges and former Sandinista President Daniel Ortega have been active participants in both Congresses, as well as guests of the GOV.

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Comment  
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12. (C) Using the Bolivarian Congresses as a public meeting place to form personal relationships, Chavez exploits the occasions to bolster radical left-wing movements throughout Latin America. He exploits the visits and conversations with Bolivarian Congress attendees to develop stronger relations in support of his revolutionary goals. While anti-imperialism, i.e. anti-American sentiment, is often a hook with many indigenous leaders, Chavez also capitalizes on racial or ethnic tensions. In countries like Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador he uses these tensions to encourage mass protests and demonstrations and to undermine shaky governments or weaken others from the left flank. Chavez's support for radical political and guerrilla leaders in countries like Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua and El Salvador can weaken fragile democracies, foster regional insecurity, and increase regional tensions. While calling for integration with South American leaders he considers sympathetic to his ideals including anti-imperialism, anti-Americanism, and anti-neoliberalism Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez befriends radical political and social leaders whose interest in "liberation" is not always accompanied by an interest in peace or democracy.  
Brownfield

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